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WILDLIFE SERVICES—OKLAHOMA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Oklahoma

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on Oklahoma Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists and technicians respond with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports, schools, and along roadways. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources, such as fisheries and timber, from wildlife depredation; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific proj-



ects conducted by Oklahoma WS include: protecting flood control structures from beaver damage; protecting livestock from predation; conducting sampling and monitoring for West Nile virus, pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, and rabies; protecting airline passengers from hazardous wildlife at airports; and managing damage caused by blackbirds, cattle egrets, pigeons, starlings, and other wildlife.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Livestock—Predators, such as coyotes, cause significant losses to many ranchers and farmers by attacking cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry. In 2005, the National Agricultural Statistics Service

(NASS) surveyed WS customers and found that, in Oklahoma, predators killed an estimated 11,600 head of cattle and calves valued at more than \$5.6 million. A NASS survey in fiscal year (FY) 2000 found that during that year predators killed more than 2,600 sheep and lambs. Research suggests these figures could be two to three times higher in the absence of an effective livestock protection program. Unfortunately, these losses are felt most acutely by small ranchers and farmers. The WS program in Oklahoma conducts a very effective program to reduce predator-caused losses to livestock and assists ranchers and farmers statewide.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports

Aircraft collisions with wildlife annually cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$550 million in direct damage and associated costs and more than 500,000 hours of aircraft downtime. There were about 7,100 bird collisions with U.S. commercial aircraft reported in 2005. Aircraft/wildlife strikes at military air bases also cause tremendous economic losses with more than 5,100 strikes reported in 2005. Since 1985 the Air Force alone has reported approximately \$522 million in damage to aircraft caused by wildlife strikes. Strikes involving military aircraft cause in excess of \$75 million in damage annually. Tragically,

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting agriculture, property and public health and safety from beaver damage
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Managing damage caused by pigeons, starlings, and blackbirds
- Protecting livestock from predators such as coyotes
- Monitoring for wildlife borne disease such as rabies, swine brucellosis, pseudorabies, and West Nile virus

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Oklahoma:

- Improving beaver damage management methods
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Improving predator damage management methods
- Improving bird damage management techniques
- Managing feral hog transmission of pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, and other diseases

these wildlife strikes have also resulted in 32 crew fatalities.

The WS program is recognized nationally and internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. The National Wildlife Research Center, WS' research arm, continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards. Applying this scientific expertise, the Oklahoma WS program provided assistance to 17 airports (14 civilian and three military) during FY06, which included direct assistance, technical assistance, and training. On-site evaluations, as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments, are conducted before direct assistance begins. WS has been able to significantly minimize the aircraft/wildlife strike hazards at these airports and military bases.

Protecting Pecans and Peanuts from Crow Depredation—Crows cause significant damage to pecan and peanut crops in Oklahoma. Annual State cash receipts for peanuts in Oklahoma average around \$50 million and cash receipts for pecans, although varying, can be as high as \$25 million. Crow damage to these crops is increasing dramatically each year. Currently Oklahoma WS provides limited direct and technical assistance to pecan and peanut growers in the State. Funding is supplied by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry for this program.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Beaver Damage—Protecting transportation, agriculture, and natural resources through beaver damage management is a major con-

sideration for WS in Oklahoma. Historically, beaver were considered a valuable natural resource and element of the economy. In recent years, however, decreased demand for beaver products resulted in less trapping and, subsequently, increased beaver numbers. Beaver now occupy all watersheds in the State, and population estimates are increasing statewide. This population escalation has resulted in some benefits derived from beaver activities, such as increased wetland habitat and reduced downstream sedimentation. Detrimental impacts from beaver activities have also increased. From FY96 through FY05, WS in Oklahoma received 18,684 requests for assistance with beaver damage problems. Typical requests involved damage to roadways and bridges, flood control structures, agriculture and forest resources, and flooding of municipal sewer and water treatment facilities.

To address some of these problems, a statewide WS beaver damage management program was established. This program assists the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF), Oklahoma Conservation Commission, city and county governments, soil and water conservation districts, private landholders, and others with beaver problems. WS runs the program through a cooperative service agreement with ODAFF. Funding comes from Federal, State, county, and private sources. Since the inception of the program, millions of dollars in additional beaver damage have been prevented.

WS routinely uses explosives to safely remove beaver dams that are flooding property. Before using explosives, Oklahoma WS personnel are trained and certified in the safe and effective use of explosives.

Looking to the Future

In Oklahoma, public safety is a concern for wildlife managers. This is particularly true at airports. Additional attention must be given to this very specialized area of work.

A second issue related to public safety and economic loss involves the increasing need to manage feral hogs, an invasive species. The state's rapidly growing feral

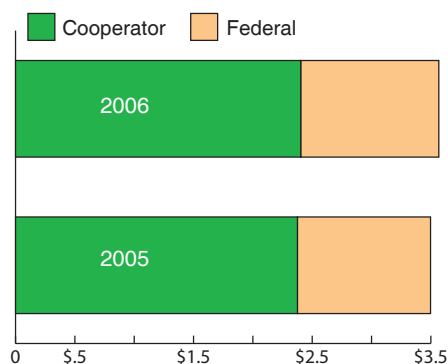
hog population is causing serious damage to crops, livestock, lawns, and property. Studies estimate property damage alone at \$200 per pig, per year. Feral hogs are recognized as well as means for the transmission of diseases such as pseudorabies, a threat to domestic livestock, and brucellosis, which puts humans and animals at risk. They also pose a threat to wildlife due to competition for food and to habitat destruction.

The State also needs to manage the transmission and spread of skunk rabies, an increasing problem. Oklahoma WS is currently assisting landowners with rabid skunks through direct operations to remove sick skunks and by providing technical assistance to individuals about how to keep children and pets safe.

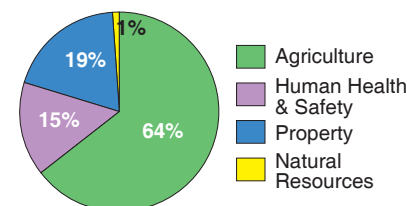
Oklahoma Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators who have a vested interest in the program: producers, private individuals, businesses, and other Federal, State, and local government agencies. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA is an equal employment provider and employer.

Major Cooperators

- Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Oklahoma Conservation Commission
- Tinker Air Force Base
- Altus Air Force Base
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Will Rogers World Airport
- Tulsa International Airport
- Oklahoma counties and cities